

## **Towards Culturally Responsive and Integrated Instruction for All Learners: The Integrated Learning Model**

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According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011a; 2011b), the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report revealed that African American and Hispanic students with disabilities continue to score well below their White and non-disabled counterparts in all areas tested and across all grade levels. Researchers continue to document the educational inequities experienced by students from these sociocultural groups (e.g., Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2009; Bradley & Renzulli, 2011). The authors use a strengths-based perspective to present a culturally responsive, integrated learning model that includes social-class sensitive pedagogy, to promote access, equity, and culturally supported experiences for African American and Hispanic children with disabilities.

*Keywords:* culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally and linguistically diverse learners, academic achievement, at risk students

African American and Hispanic students have a well-documented history of being at-risk for school failure and being overrepresented in special education. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011a; 2011b), results from the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report revealed that students with disabilities and students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) and/or low-income backgrounds continue to score well below their White counterparts in all areas and across all grade levels. Further, these gaps generally do not diminish. In mathematics, the gap increases as students progress through school. The overwhelming majority of these students attend high poverty, low-quality schools where there is little consideration for race, ethnicity, culture, language, or disability (Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2009). Despite reform efforts, the quality of education in these schools is generally inferior to that of schools in middle-class neighborhoods (Taines, 2012).

The alienating conditions present in these schools in low-income neighborhoods can lead to a general disengagement from school for many students. In fact, African American students and students with disabilities are twice as likely as their White peers to drop out of school and Hispanic students are two and a half times as likely (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & KewalRamani, 2011), beginning a cycle that leads to unemployment and continued poverty as well as potential imprisonment. The consequences of this can be devastating and costly. This article explores an integrated learning model via cultural awareness and action-based culturally responsive pedagogy that can be used as a tool to interrupt this cycle and help end the failing schools and vulnerable outcomes for African American and Hispanic youth with disabilities.

## Theoretical Framework

Most of the research on African American and Hispanic youth assumes a deficit-based perspective (Nygren, 2006). For example, Bourdieu's (1977) contention that an individual's life experiences are generally predetermined by the family's socioeconomic and intellectual background parallels recent studies that have found that students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and whose parents did not graduate from high school also tend to not graduate (e.g., Fall & Roberts, 2012).

Recent dropout rates for children who live in families in the lowest income quartile have been reported at 13% compared to 2.3% for children of families in the highest quartile (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Although other data suggest that the achievement gap between the rich and poor is twice that of the achievement gap between White and African American children of similar socioeconomic status (Reardon, 2011), one must be cautious not to equate poverty with academic ineptness. As Blanchett et al. (2009) explain, students who live in poverty often attend insufficiently funded and under-resourced schools. These conditions often lead to school disengagement for many students.

Yosso (2002) proposed an alternative to theories that view socioeconomic background as the main contributor to school failure. Despite perceptions that generally attribute failure in school to low family socioeconomic background, other more powerful forms of cultural capital can counteract this effect. Yosso asserted that people's social standing (regardless of belonging to a lower socioeconomic stratum) and related experiences can actually help them achieve as opposed to hindering them. Specifically, Yosso's theory points toward the idea that each individual, including those in historically disenfranchised groups, possesses: (a) aspirational capital—maintaining dreams and aspirations; (b) linguistic capital—the intellectual skills that result from bilingualism or multilingualism; (c) familial capital—knowledge communicated via family history or personal stories; (d) social capital—networking and community resources; (e) navigational capital—ability to understand how societal institutions function; and (e) resistance capital—challenging and mobilizing against injustice.

Yosso's model focuses on the importance of community culture capital. At the core of this model are the experiences each student of color and/or with a disability brings into the learning context. In contrast with other Euro-centered forms of culture capital (e.g., Bourdieu's), these not only highlight the cultural wealth of the individual but also emphasize communal cultural relevancy and capital (Yosso, 2005). Culturally responsive special education upholds the same principles while incorporating the impact of disability status. Specifically, the aspirational tenet relates to maximizing the learners' potential while empowering them to become self-advocates. The social and linguistic tenets promote strategies to generalize pro-social behaviors that include appropriate formal and informal communication skills. The familial capital acknowledges the impact of the families' culture on how they interpret disability, as well as the importance of their *voices* on educational decisions. The navigational tenet focuses on academic accommodations or adaptations that help learners succeed and provide them with the ability to understand the processes and services related to special education. Lastly, resistance capital aims to help students thrive, despite the existing disability, with the ultimate goal being graduation and a career path.

By viewing student achievement through this lens, the school as an institution can now be used as a catalyst to assist students in using their heritage or disability status as a tool, rather than a vulnerability in achieving. Relatedly, based on a conceptual framework suggested by Bost (2006), schools are responsible for creating a climate that provides pro-social behaviors, academic success, highly qualified teachers, and effective transition services to potentially increase successful outcomes. To foster this school climate, teachers need to increase the likelihood that students have instructional and behavioral supports, as well as access to relevant content and quality instruction. Due to the complexity of the achievement gap phenomenon, it is necessary to explore the interactions of sociocultural and socioeconomic realities, particularly for African American and Hispanic students at risk for special education placement, in order to provide a more complete perspective and encourage deeper understandings.

The real question becomes: “How do we foster aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistance capital in an environment that is oftentimes antagonistic to their very nature?” Jones and Vagle (2013) proposed a social class-sensitive pedagogy where the societal hierarchies are redefined through a more equitable lens. Under this type of pedagogy, the White middle class typically developing individual is no longer the standard to which all who do not measure up to are considered inferior. Accordingly, the five tenets of social-class sensitive pedagogy include: (a) analyzing educators’ and students’ experiences of class within broad social and political contexts; (b) locating and disrupting social classed hierarchies in schools and communities; (c) integrating social class and marginalized perspectives into curriculum; (d) perceiving classed bodies in moment-to-moment interactions with educators, students, and families; and (e) changing broader school and classroom policies and practices to reflect anti-classist and antipoverty commitment. Understanding the interaction of the theories presented and how they affect schooling within the current realities that exist can potentially lead toward progress in closing achievement and ultimately social-class gaps.

### **Current Realities**

Personal factors such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability/disability, language proficiency, engagement in school, and student behavior have continually been used to explain poor academic performance (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009). However, to provide a more comprehensive solution, external factors must also be considered. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2012) has identified four broad categories of factors that work against adequate student achievement in school—the individual, family, school, and community.

#### **The Individual**

The lack of appropriate engagement in school, both academically (i.e., student’s readiness to learn) and socially (i.e., student’s relationship with teachers, school staff, and peers), indicates withdrawal. Engagement reflects the student’s identification with school, learning and fitting in (Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2008). Gradual disengagement from the school’s culture due to lack of involvement in school activities can begin as early as first grade for students experiencing academic and behavioral difficulties (Schoeneberger, 2012). Hispanic students, for example, often feel a sense of not belonging because of the cultural incongruence between the Hispanic

culture and White middle-class culture of most schools (Rodriguez, 2012). Language barriers often contribute to isolation from both peers and teachers. Similarly, African American students who use African American Vernacular English, a legitimate American dialect (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2003), to communicate often find themselves isolated within the classroom, seated farthest from the teacher, called on less frequently than other students, and often receiving more negative criticism and less praise than their peers (Ford, 2011).

Students with disabilities are particularly at risk for poor academic performance. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2011), approximately 6.6 million students in the United States are identified as having a disability and approximately 22% of those students will drop out of school before graduating. The IQ-achievement discrepancy model (also known as the wait-to-fail model) typically associated with special education, where students first have to underperform in order to receive the necessary educational interventions, suggests that students with disabilities are put at risk early in their educational lives (McNamara, Scissons, & Gutknecht, 2011). Students with disabilities may be years behind in core subjects (Impecoven-Lind & Foegen, 2010). If these students do not receive support during the early years, it is likely they will never catch up (McNamara et al., 2011). African American students with a disability are at a higher risk than their White peers to be placed in restrictive school environments leading to feelings of social isolation, lower self-esteem, and increased risk of dropping out (Raines, Dever, Kamphaus, & Roach, 2012). Moreover, once students are placed in special education classes, they are likely to never be exited and therefore stay in special education, which risks limiting their access to a rigorous curriculum and a post-secondary education (Ahram, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011).

The lack of appropriate engagement in school, both academically and socially, indicates withdrawal. Engagement reflects the student's identification with school, learning, and fitting in (Pyle & Wexler, 2012). Because of cultural differences, minority students often experience a feeling of loss of identity and motivation while attending schools where the majority of the students are of a different race or ethnic group. Having a disability makes the education experience even more difficult since having a disability often adds socialization skills that are different and at times inappropriate. Children with disabilities often lack the cooperation and self-control skills needed to interact with other students and teachers, which can lead to difficult relations, especially with peers. Being victimized or rejected by peers can have negative effects on motivation and school engagement (Milsom & Glanville, 2010).

Hope, Chavous, Jagers, and Sellers (2013) found that positive racial group identification can strengthen the connections between self-esteem and achievement. In their study of Mexican American high school students, Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) found cultural pride and awareness to be significant predictors of academic resilience. Over a decade later, Dotterer, McHale and Crouter (2009) found that ethnic identity had a positive effect on socio-cultural factors and school engagement of African American adolescents. Students who have higher levels of ethnic and racial group identity tend to report higher levels of school engagement compared to students who have lower levels of ethnic and racial group identity (Dotterer et al., 2009). However, Hope et al. found that for African American students, the relationship between racial group identification, self-esteem, and academic achievement is inconsistent. Identification with a

stigmatized group, due to historical and contemporary racism or disability status, can put these students at risk for academic failure. Students who internalize negative views of their group could experience lower than average academic performance. Group identification also may be linked to disengagement in other ways. African American students who recognize that economic and social barriers exist for their group may come to feel that education is not the route to upward mobility (Butler-Barnes, Williams, & Chavous, & 2012).

## **The Family**

Family factors have also been the focus of urban education research in an attempt to find the causes of low academic achievement. Low achieving students tend to have parents who are not involved in their education or their lives (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Moore, & Fox, 2010), and they often live in poverty in families headed by a female who is single (Saatcioglu, 2010). Because of socioeconomic hardships, families may have a survival-oriented approach rather than a child centered approach to child rearing. The need for daily survival may work against family involvement in the child's education because caregivers may be less available to spend quality time with their children (Ford, 2011). Furthermore, these families may not have the resources needed (e.g., books) to create a stimulating environment. When parent/caregiver presence is low, children are generally left alone to make choices for themselves; and unsupervised children may spend their time participating in activities that are not school related, causing them to fall behind (Davis-Kean & Sexton, 2009). For children with disabilities, economic and social hardships can translate into a decreased likelihood that parents will be able to help their children overcome the disability because there are fewer resources for treatment. Therefore, students with a low socioeconomic status and a disability find that the interaction of these two factors intensifies the negative effect of each factor thereby deterring the student from completing high school (Hughes & Avoke, 2010).

Immigrant status may also play a role in parent/family involvement in a child's education (Davis-Kean & Sexton, 2009). For example, with first generation Hispanic students, the lack of parental involvement is often due to the parents' limited English language proficiency. These students are more likely than any other ethnic group to come from a home where the parents do not speak English and where the level of parental education is low, making it difficult for the parents to assist with academic tasks. The low parental education that is often typical of immigrants arriving from developing countries makes it difficult for these parents to navigate the school system to get help for their child when needed (Gándara, 2010). Social and cultural values influence beliefs and awareness of what constitutes typical development and may, for example, lead to a lack of knowledge of which services are available to children with disabilities (Banerjee & Luckner, 2014).

It is important to note that the identification of risk factors is not enough to predict poor academic achievement or special education identification. Despite the presence of challenges in their daily lives, many students persevere and succeed. A close tie exists between positive academic outcomes and academic support from family, friends, and teachers (Lessard, Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, & Royer, 2009). Specifically, at-risk students who succeed academically have family members that understand and express the value of school and to the child. Often, these students have positive relationships with parents who closely monitor their friendships and

academic performance. Accordingly, these children generally avoid deviant peers and have high self-esteem. When faced with difficult teachers or difficult tasks, these students are convinced that they can succeed (Murray & Naranjo, 2008) and are willing to advocate for themselves in school and seek the help and support of an adult when they need it (Lessard et al., 2009).

Harry and Klingner (2006) suggested that tapping into family strengths is central to a child's educational experience, especially for children with a disability, and they warn against negative biases that might cause educators to view family involvement through narrow, stereotypical criteria. Kalyanpur and Harry (2012) explained the need for cultural reciprocity when working with parents, and the need to identify incongruencies between families' expectations of education, outcomes, and involvement for their children with disabilities and the expectations of many school professionals. Similarly, Sheldon, Epstein and Galindo (2010) called on teachers and schools to make a concerted effort to create high quality partnership practices with families in order to reach important school goals, such as improved student motivation to learn. Supportive activities that involve parents with children and teachers can create a partnership climate capable of increasing student proficiency. Low income and CLD families often become both the victims of and accountable for the circumstances of their children, with educators and schools being exonerated of their negative roles and impact. Yet, it is the school and the classroom that set the socio-emotional tone for learning (Harry & Klingner, 2006).

## **The School**

The public school structure in the United States reflects White, middle class values and norms. Educators interpret the performance and behavior of low-income and CLD students through parameters of what competence and proper behavior should look like (Rodriguez, 2012). However, the values and norms that make up these parameters are not always aligned with those of low income and CLD students and their families (Klingner et al., 2005). If students' performance and behaviors do not align with these parameters, their performances are often regarded as deficient and their behaviors as inappropriate.

Schools are seen as the vehicle that ensures upward social mobility (Harry & Klingner, 2006). Yet, because of inequitable funding, low expectations, and curricula differentiated along social-class lines and according to ability/disability (Oakes, 2010), upward mobility fails to become a reality for many students. Harry and Klingner assert that school quality can be identified in terms of effective or ineffective administrative decision-making, instruction, discipline policies, parent/school personnel interactions, and teacher quality. Schools that lack essential materials are dirty, overcrowded, and unsafe. These schools are common in low-income neighborhoods or are often in neighborhoods with high concentrations of Hispanic and African American families (Oakes, 2010). High poverty schools in Black neighborhoods tend to fair worse than high poverty schools in Hispanic neighborhoods (Harry & Klingner, 2006).

Moreover, low-income and CLD students are more likely than their White counterparts to attend schools that are inadequately funded and staffed. Teachers in these schools tend to be less experienced and have fewer qualifications and advanced degrees than teachers who work in middle and high-income neighborhoods (Balfanz et al., 2010). Also, due to the lack of experience, these teachers have inadequate instructional and classroom management skills. The

quality of education they provide is inadequate and they spend more time on behavioral issues than on instruction (Ford, 2011).

Furthermore, inadequate disciplinary procedures are also problematic because they can lead to excessive reliance on zero tolerance policies (Gonsoulin, Zablocki, & Leone, 2012). Although these policies were initially enacted to keep schools free of drugs and protect the school environment from threats of violence (Fuentes, 2012), these policies are often used to deal with misconduct that would have simply landed students from earlier generations in the principal's office.

While schools with large minority, low-income populations are more likely to have zero tolerance policies than schools in affluent neighborhoods (Fuentes, 2012), unfortunately these policies sometimes lead to high levels of out of school suspensions and expulsions, which in turn can lead to a cycle of students falling behind and not being able to catch up. This can subsequently translate into student disengagement and even school dropout (Brownstein, 2010).

Zero tolerance policies disproportionately target African-American and Hispanic students as well as students with disabilities, particularly those with emotional and/or behavioral disorders (McNeal & Dunbar, 2010). Research has shown that African-American students are three times more likely to be suspended, and three and a half times more likely to be expelled when compared to White students; whereas, Hispanic students are one and a half times more likely to be suspended and twice as likely as their White peers to be expelled (Brownstein, 2010). While students with disabilities, make up 11% to 14% of the total student population, they make up 20% to 24% of the number of students suspended or expelled (Williams, Pazey, Shelby, & Yates, 2013).

Additionally, schools in low-income areas are often large, overcrowded, and more bureaucratic and hierarchical with impersonal relationships than schools in higher income neighborhoods; interactions between students and teachers are reduced; and the environment is often intimidating (Rodriguez, 2012) or unwelcoming, making both students and parents feel like they do not belong in the school (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012). Researchers have called for policies and practices that lead to stronger schools in low-income neighborhoods in which the teachers in them convey the message that high academic expectations and respect for individual differences are characteristics of the school's culture (Ford, 2011; Harry & Klingner, 2006). That is, culturally responsive schools that instill ethics of care, respect, and responsibility provide low-income and CLD students with access to a high quality, dignified and meaningful education (Jones & Vagle, 2013).

## **The Community**

Many studies of academic performance do not take into consideration the community. Benson and Borman (2010) assert that equalizing achievement among students from different social and racial/ethnic backgrounds is virtually impossible if the neighborhood conditions in which children grow up are not taken into account. They contend that schools inherit the inequalities of their neighborhood contexts because students tend to go to their neighborhood schools and as a result, mirror the socioeconomic, racial and ethnic makeup of the surrounding neighborhood.

Further, Benson and Boraman noted that when students from a lower socioeconomic status (SES) attend middle SES schools, it tends to boost their achievement and educational outcomes. If policymakers want to improve high poverty neighborhoods and schools they need to replicate the advantages present in socially advantaged neighborhoods and schools—i.e., high quality teachers with effective instructional and classroom management skills and adequate resources such as up-to-date textbooks (Benson & Borman, 2010).

Taking into consideration the community in which the teacher lives may also shed light on the situations that place children at risk for academic failure. The vast majority of teachers are White middle-class females, with approximately 15% being CLD (this includes all CLD groups combined); and of the total number with only about 1.2% Black males (Ford, 2011). These numbers raise concerns about the cultural competence of the educators teaching low-income and CLD students (Ford, 2011). In essence, low-income and CLD students are being educated by teachers who do not share their socioeconomic and racial/ethnic or cultural background, which often forces these students to face pressures not shared by students who are of the same race and cultural background as the teacher (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, & Garrison-Wade, 2008). Furthermore, most curricula tend to reflect a White middle-class English-speaking perspective (Rodriguez, 2012). Failure on the part of teachers to address or value their students' primary culture could be a significant factor in the student's underachievement (Cohen-Vogel, Goldring, & Smrekar, 2010).

### **Proposing a Solution Model**

Given the established concerns surrounding the educational vulnerabilities for African American and Hispanic youth with disabilities and the current realities present in individuals, families, schools, and communities, we must consider exploring effective practices that can be applied in multiple contexts. If we choose to view the achievement disparities through a lens of opportunity for education rather than circumstances as pre-determined by context, we can empower African American and Hispanic students with disabilities to leverage their cultural capital. One tool that has long been recommended for effectively educating this population is culturally responsive teaching (CRT, Gay, 2002, 2010). CRT encompasses many of the guiding principles found in Yosso's theory of building on the unique strengths and social capitals that diverse families possess. Based on this perspective, if we allow students from typically disenfranchised groups to influence and shape instruction, they can achieve educational capital as well. The success of cultural infusion within the context of learning is largely dependent on positioning the individual experiences within the context of larger social phenomena. African American and Hispanic students with disabilities are typically in powerless positions due to achievement gaps, school failure, and subsequent outcomes.

Similarly, inclusive service delivery models examine the environment, equity of opportunity, and access to appropriate educational settings. Frattura and Capper (2006) developed an integrated comprehensive services model focusing on equity of access to education for students with disabilities. By merging principles of inclusivity, access, and cultural responsiveness; and by linking to the current realities that many African American and Hispanic youth with disabilities encounter within the families, schools, and communities in which they grow up, we must develop a social-class sensitive pedagogy that takes into account these socio-economic realities

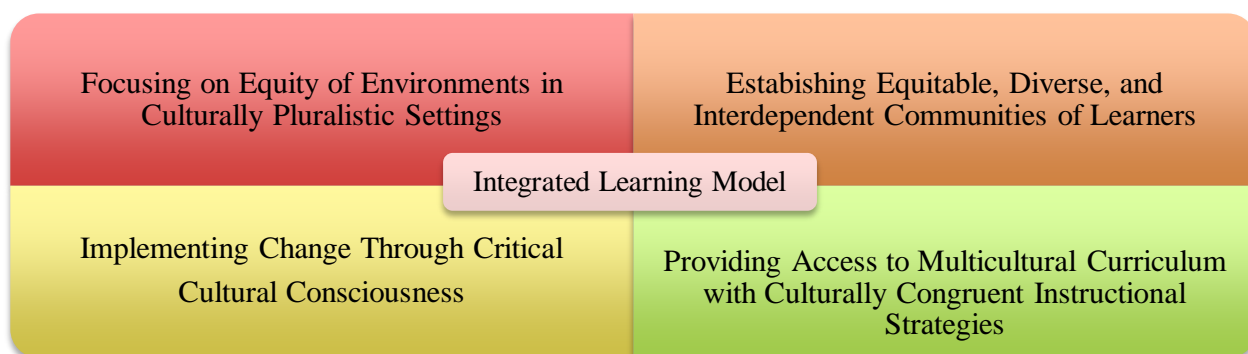


that are the culture of these populations. Only then, can equitable and culturally relevant approaches be utilized as a potential solution to closing the achievement gap and placing these students in a role of power where they can ultimately become responsible and empowered to make personal changes to improve their circumstances.

## Integrated Learning Model

A combination of the previous approaches to culturally responsive teaching and inclusive service delivery models can ideally provide a model that facilitates equal access to quality instruction and learning for all students. Figure 1 shows the integrated learning model that we developed, which incorporates and expands the work of Gay (2002, 2010) and Frattura and Capper (2006) by infusing their components with social-class sensitive pedagogy (Jones & Vagle, 2013) to provide equity in education for at-risk students.

**Figure 1. Integrated Learning Model**



*Note: This model infuses elements of Gay's (2002, 2010) components of culturally responsive teaching and Frattura and Capper's (2006) integrated comprehensive services model.*

As depicted, the proposed model addresses various school-related constructs that affect the learning potential of students, particularly African American and Hispanic students, with documented risk for negative educational outcomes or potential dropout. This model can potentially facilitate integrated quality instruction, promote student learning, and increase academic potential and continued school engagement.

*Focusing on equity of environments in culturally pluralistic settings.* The first tenet of the integrated learning model involves designing inclusive classrooms where all students, including those with disabilities, are valued and made to feel like an integral part of the classroom culture. All students receive purposeful and meaningful learning opportunities from qualified teachers regardless of their socioeconomic background, ability level, or family circumstance.

Equity of classroom environments should not be differentiated based upon the socioeconomic status of the community in which the school is located. High expectations for academic achievement should exist for all students, even those with learning and/or behavioral challenges. The focus should be on finding ways to support student success within the classroom, rather than turning towards exclusionary practices such as suspensions, expulsions, or referrals to segregated

settings. Exposure to peers who are academically oriented is especially important in schools where student achievement tends to be low and can lead to greater connectedness to schools, which can be a predictor of decreased dropout, even at an early age (Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012). This tenet of the model can strengthen student bonds and engagement.

*Establishing equitable, diverse, and interdependent communities of learners.* The second tenet is a continuation of the first tenet. It provides the framework for setting up equitable relationships between students within classroom environments.

Within the context of culturally responsive teaching as supported by Gay (2002, 2010), teachers must facilitate collaborative and cooperative classroom structures where students can rely on each other as members of a community of learners. Students must be accountable for the progress and success of each other as a team. When students value the cultural capital that each contributes to the team and encourage each other to use these as strengths in achieving common goals, academic achievement and prosocial behaviors increase (Wentzel, McNamara-Barry, & Caldwell, 2004).

*Implementing change through critical cultural consciousness.* This tenet involves implementing change in specific practices such as teachers confronting their own biases as related to language, culture, socioeconomic status, or disability label(s) of students. These biases must also be explored among the students towards each other.

Once all members of the class are viewed through a lens of respect and equal rights to be full members of the class, the types of interactions that occur between teachers and students should change. This leads to higher levels of positive peer norms and positive ethnic identity, both of which have been associated with increased student engagement (Shin, Daly, & Vera, 2007). This also leads to a reduction in the removal of students with disabilities from the general education classroom and a decrease in teaching students in contrived situations, such as segregated resource rooms, that teach concepts in isolation with little or no contextual reference (Frattura & Capper, 2006).

*Providing access to multicultural curriculum with culturally congruent instructional strategies.* The final tenet of the proposed integrated learning model addresses the classroom environment with the idea that in order to truly facilitate integrated quality instruction, teachers must be highly qualified in their subject areas; the content must be culturally relevant; and the teachers must be skilled in designing their instruction so that it is tailored to be compatible with learners who bring various abilities, skill sets, and learning styles to the classroom. The curriculum recognizes and values the family and community experience each student brings to the class via their respective cultural capitals. As such, the curriculum must include components that empower students to become anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-poverty, and pro-positive social change agents as an imperative to support the academic success of all members of the classroom.

## Conclusion

The larger theoretical implications of cultural marginalization have resulted in systemic practices that viewed those who were not part of the dominant ethnic class as disenfranchised outsiders.

While creating sustainable answers to the long-standing questions surrounding cultural capital can take years, some educational models have begun the re-structuring process. And, given the negative impact of overrepresentation and the mis-education of African American and Hispanic youth, it seems fitting that culturally responsive models be implemented to close the achievement gap and put an end to the failure of schools in appropriately serving students with the greatest need for education.

For culturally responsive models to work, they must focus on the student's immediate environment as the catalyst for sustainable change. Given the impact of culture on perceptions, these models must also be sensitive to the student's social class and disability status. The answer to upward mobility and academic success does not lie in maligning the student's current social strata as something to "get out of" but rather something to propel the student forward.

The deficit-based perspective where African American and Hispanic students with disabilities are depicted as plagued by their own circumstances must be replaced with one that uses their comprehensive environment as a catalyst towards education equity and intellectual emancipation. The proposed integrated learning model, which is based on a broader, more inclusive definition of culture within the context of education, may be a successful tool for addressing the needs of the increasingly diverse student population in today's schools.

## AUTHOR NOTES

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